



The U.S. Military Presence in Okinawa and the Futenma Base Controversy

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Summary

Although the U.S.-Japan alliance is often labeled as “the cornerstone” of security in the Asia Pacific region, local concerns about the U.S. military presence on the Japanese island of Okinawa have challenged the management of the alliance for decades. The Japanese archipelago serves as the most significant forward-operating platform for the U.S. military in the region; approximately 53,000 military personnel (39,000 onshore and 14,000 afloat in nearby waters), 43,000 dependents, and 5,000 Department of Defense civilian employees live in Japan. With the United States pledging to rebalance its defense posture towards Asia, the uncertainty surrounding the medium and long-term presence of American forces on Okinawa remains a critical concern for national security decision-makers.

Due to the legacy of the U.S. occupation and the island’s key strategic location, Okinawa hosts a disproportionate share of the continuing U.S. military presence. About 25% of all facilities used by U.S. Forces Japan and about half of the U.S. military personnel are located in the prefecture, which comprises less than 1% of Japan’s total land area. Many Okinawans oppose the U.S. military presence, although some observers assert that Tokyo has failed to communicate effectively to Okinawans the benefits of the alliance. However, Okinawa has received billions of dollars in subsidies from the central government in recognition of its burden of hosting U.S. troops.

In 2006, as part of a broad realignment of U.S. basing in Japan, the United States and Japan agreed to relocate Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma to a less-congested area on Okinawa and then redeploy 8,000 marines to U.S. bases in Guam. The arrangement was designed to reduce the local community’s burden of hosting a loud air base that has generated safety concerns and, eventually, to return control of the Futenma land to local authorities as a way to boost economic development in the area. The controversy surrounding relocation of MCAS Futenma has overshadowed progress in other elements of the realignment of U.S. Forces Japan.

Facing delays in relocating the Futenma base, in 2012 the United States and Japan agreed to “de-link” the replacement facility with the transfer of marines to Guam. The current plan is to relocate 9,000 marines (and their dependents) from Okinawa, deploying 5,000 to Guam, 2,500 to Australia on a rotational basis, and 1,500 to Hawaii as soon as the receiving facilities are ready. The U.S. Congress has raised concerns about the cost and feasibility of moving the Marines to Guam and other locations and blocked some funds dedicated to the realignment in military construction legislation.

In the last days of 2013, the United States and Japan cleared an important political hurdle in their long-delayed plan to relocate the Futenma base when the governor of Okinawa approved construction of an offshore landfill necessary to build the replacement facility. The governor’s approval of the landfill permit should in theory allow Washington and Tokyo to consummate their agreement to return the land occupied by MCAS Futenma to local authorities, while retaining a similar level of military capability on Okinawa. A U.S.-Japan joint planning document in April 2013 indicated that the new base at Henoko would be completed no earlier than 2022.

Despite this progress, many challenges remain to implementation. Most Okinawans oppose the construction of a new U.S. base for a mix of political, environmental, and quality-of-life reasons. Okinawan anti-base civic groups may take extreme measures to prevent construction of the facility at Henoko. Any heavy-handed actions by Tokyo or Washington could lead to stridently anti-base politicians making gains in Okinawa, particularly in the gubernatorial election scheduled for November 2014. Meanwhile, the Futenma base remains in operation, raising fears that an accident might further inflame Okinawan opposition.

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Background

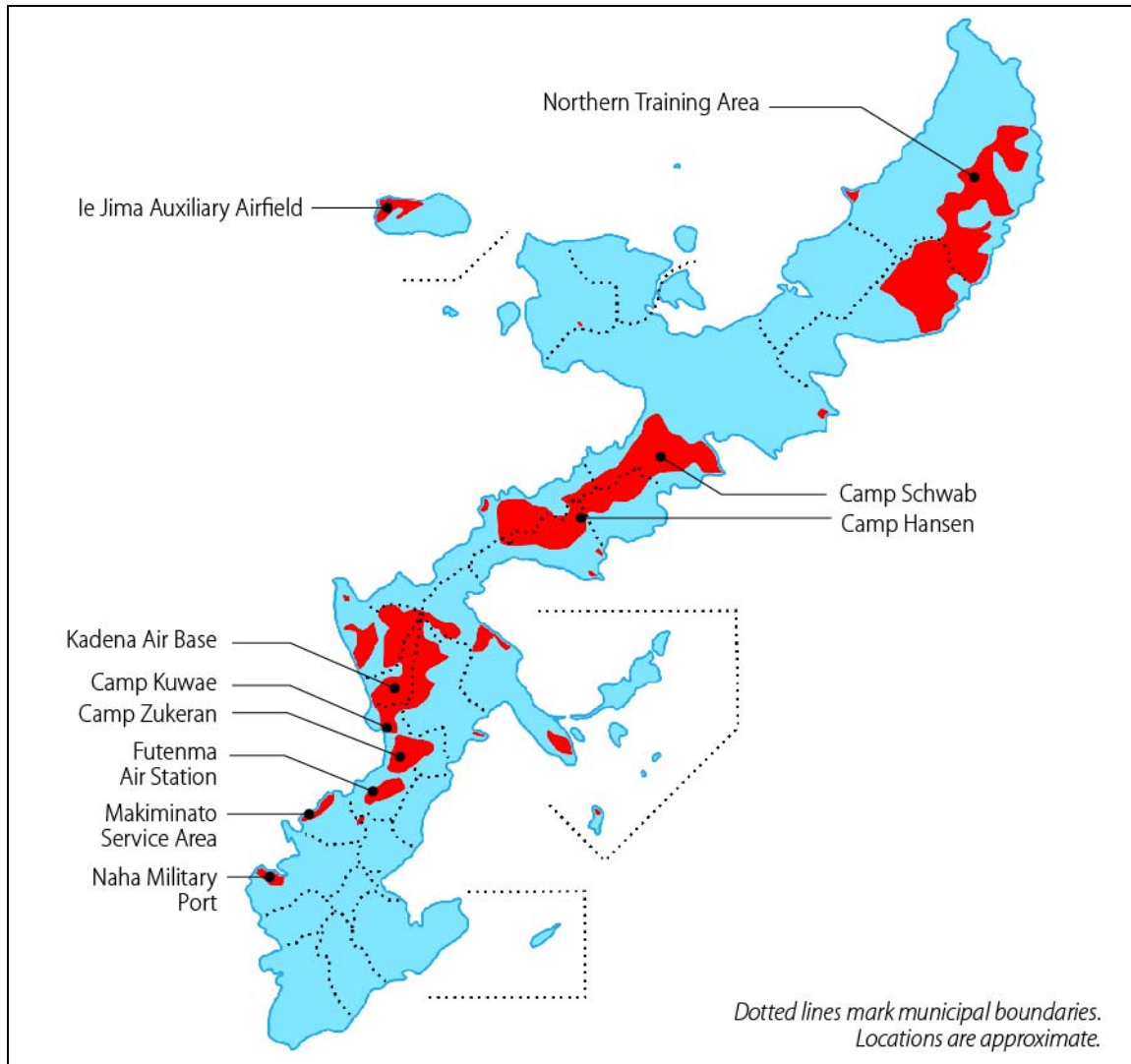
Despite the prominence of the U.S.-Japan alliance in America's overall strategic posture in the Asia-Pacific region, local concerns about the U.S. military presence on Okinawa have challenged the management of the alliance for decades. In recent years, Okinawan resistance has crystallized around the relocation of a U.S. Marine Corps Air Station. The Japanese islands serve as the most significant forward-operating platform for the U.S. military in the region. With the United States pledging to rebalance its defense posture towards Asia, the uncertainty surrounding the medium and long-term presence of American forces on Okinawa remains a critical concern for national security decision-makers. Many regional analysts have posed the question of whether this issue is at its core simply a dispute over real estate, or if the controversy threatens the fundamental sustainability of the alliance.

The relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma (MCAS Futenma) is the largest and most problematic part of a broad overhaul of the stationing of U.S. forces in Japan. A 2006 agreement between the U.S. and Japanese governments to relocate the Futenma base from its current location in the crowded city of Ginowan to Camp Schwab in Henoko, a less congested part of the island, was envisioned as the centerpiece of a planned realignment of U.S. forces. The anticipated air station is often referred to as the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF). The arrangement was designed to reduce the local community's burden of hosting a loud air base that has generated safety concerns and, eventually, to return control of the Futenma land to local authorities as a way to boost economic development in the area. In addition, the relocation would have triggered the transfer of roughly 8,000 marines and their dependents from Japan to new facilities in Guam. Japan agreed to pay around 60% of the costs, then estimated at \$10.3 billion.

The agreement was struck at a moment when the bilateral relationship was seen as at its strongest point in decades, but implementation has been a struggle, due largely to political turmoil in Tokyo and resistance in Okinawa. In the watershed August 2009 parliamentary elections, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) defeated the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had held power nearly continuously since the mid-1950s. Incoming DPJ Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama had pledged in his campaign to close MCAS Futenma and remove its functions from Okinawa. During Hatoyama's term, a number of possible options for resolving the Futenma conundrum were examined but ultimately discarded, and Hatoyama came to support the Henoko FRF site before his resignation in May 2010. Since then, his successors also have endorsed the 2006 plan, but many Okinawans now insist on closure of Futenma and relocation outside the prefecture. In addition, the U.S. Congress has raised major concerns about the ballooning costs of moving the Marines to Guam and blocked funds dedicated to the Marine Corps realignment.

Essentially conceding that the existing agreement appeared unlikely to move forward, the United States and Japan officially adjusted the policy in April 2012 by "de-linking" the transfer of the Marines to Guam with progress on the new base in the Henoko village area of Nago City. The announcement also stipulated that arrangements to return some land used by U.S. forces would not be contingent on the base relocation. In order to ease the burden on Okinawan residents, about 9,000 U.S. marines would be transferred to locations outside of Japan: 5,000 marines to Guam, 1,500 to Hawaii, and 2,500 on a rotational basis to Australia. Alliance officials packaged the move as in line with their goal of making U.S. force posture in Asia "more geographically distributed, operationally resilient, and politically sustainable." Both capitals remain officially committed to the construction of a new aviation facility at Camp Schwab, despite political and budgetary obstacles in the near term.

Figure I. Selected U.S. Military Installations on Okinawa



Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Notes: Not all U.S. military facilities are labeled.

Apparent Breakthrough on Futenma Base Relocation in 2013

In late December 2013, the Governor of Okinawa Prefecture, Hirokazu Nakaima, bucked expert predictions and effectively approved construction of a new facility to replace the Futenma base. Nakaima approved the central government's request to create a large landfill offshore of Camp Schwab at the Cape Henoko site. The landfill permit was the last major administrative barrier that Okinawan officials could use to prevent the beginning of major construction for the FRF.

Although Okinawan anti-base protesters have vowed to obstruct the construction with all means at their disposal, it is unlikely that civil disobedience will succeed in preventing the new facility from being built. Nevertheless, construction of the offshore runways is a serious engineering challenge in its own right; the projected completion date is April 2022 or later.

Governor Nakaima's approval of the landfill permit was the culmination of decades of negotiations between Tokyo and Okinawa. Over the years, the central government provided a number of incentives and special considerations for Okinawa. Ten days prior to his decision, Nakaima submitted a list of bold requests to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, with the implication that these were conditions for assenting to the new facility at Henoko (see section "Role of the Prefectural Governor"). Several of the requests, namely revision of the bilateral Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), are subject to agreement with the United States, and thus not within the authority of the Japanese government to fulfill unilaterally. However, Prime Minister Abe accommodated the governor's requests to a great extent, including a large financial support package and a promise to negotiate with the United States regarding Okinawan priorities.

In signing the landfill permit, Governor Nakaima apparently concluded that the downsides of a new base on Okinawa were outweighed by the benefits of additional economic support from Tokyo and the opportunity to eliminate the risks of the Futenma base (see section "Ongoing Risks of Futenma Operations"). The apparent determination of Prime Minister Abe to follow through on the relocation of MCAS Futenma, coupled with his strong political foundation for remaining in office, may also have been a major factor in the decision. A December 2013 public opinion poll by two liberal (anti-base) media outlets found that 64% of Okinawan voters thought Governor Nakaima should reject the Henoko landfill permit and 22% thought he should approve it.¹

Outlook for Construction of Offshore Runways at the Henoko Site

Construction of the new facility will involve challenges for both law enforcement officials and engineers working on the project. Reportedly, the offshore runways will require 21 million cubic meters of soil to create 395 acres of reclaimed land.² The bulk of this soil will be delivered by ship from other areas of Japan. Japanese and U.S. officials announced that construction of the FRF would be finished in April 2022 at the earliest, but a slightly larger offshore runway project at the Iwakuni Marine Corps base in mainland Japan took 13 years to complete.³ The Henoko land reclamation project could proceed faster than the Iwakuni project if Tokyo commits more administrative attention and resources to it. Abe Administration officials have repeatedly declared their intent to return MCAS Futenma to local control as soon as possible, and the most plausible means of achieving that goal would be to accelerate construction of the Henoko FRF.⁴

Construction of the new base will also be a law enforcement challenge for Japan. The ability and will of the Okinawan Prefectural Police to thwart determined anti-base protesters and enable smooth construction could be severely tested. The Japanese Coast Guard could also be called into service to prevent sea-going protestors from interfering with the land reclamation operation. The mayor of the local municipality (Nago City) has declared that he will not cooperate whatsoever in construction of the Henoko FRF (see section "Nago City Political Dynamics"), which could bring additional inconveniences and logistical delays.

¹ "Asahi Poll: 64% of Okinawa voters want rejection of reclamation plan for U.S. air base," *Asahi Shimbun*, December 17, 2013.

² "Futenma Replacement Facility Bilateral Experts Study Group Report," August 31, 2010, available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/pdfs/futenma-report1008.pdf>.

³ "New runway open for use," U.S. Marine Corps Releases, June 3, 2010.

⁴ In April 2014, the commander of Marine Forces Japan reiterated the U.S. position that the Marine Corps would not cease operations at Futenma until a replacement facility on Okinawa is completed. Lt. Gen. John Wissler, "Realizing the Rebalance: The United States Marine Corps in Asia," remarks as delivered at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, April 10, 2014.

Okinawa's Strategic Importance

Okinawa's key strategic location has become more important over the past few decades. (See **Figure 2**.) In the post-World War II environment, Japan's northern islands were seen as a bulwark to contain the Soviet Union's Pacific fleet. Post-Cold War security threats include the potential flashpoints of the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait, but more recent assertiveness by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the South China Sea and East China Sea has drawn growing attention from Defense Department planners. The U.S. military presence in Japan, and particularly Okinawa, allows it to fulfill its obligations under the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security to not only defend Japan but to maintain security in the Asia-Pacific region. The forward-deployed presence of the U.S. Air Force and Navy also allows for response to humanitarian disasters in the region, as demonstrated by the rapid U.S. assistance after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan and after the November 2013 super-typhoon in the Philippines.

The intensification of the territorial dispute between Japan and China over small islands in the East China Sea has provided another rationale for the approximately 19,000 marines stationed on Okinawa. The main island of Okinawa is only 270 nautical miles from the disputed islets, called Senkaku in Japan, Diaoyu in China, and Diaoyutai in Taiwan. The potential role of U.S. Marines in defending and/or retaking uninhabited islands from a hypothetical invasion force is unclear, but the operational capabilities of the Okinawa-based Marines are aligned with the needs of such a mission.

Although most strategists agree on the importance of Okinawa's location for U.S. security interests in East Asia, there is less consensus on the particular number of marines necessary to maintain stability. For example, two prominent analysts suggested a rethinking of U.S. military basing in light of cuts to the U.S. defense budget and Okinawan obstacles; they argue that leaving a force of 5,000-10,000 marines on Okinawa while also pre-positioning supply vessels in Japanese waters and bringing most of the marines home to California would amply serve U.S. rapid response and deterrence needs.⁵ Defense officials continue to assert the need for substantial numbers of U.S. marines to be positioned in Asia, but have offered a degree of flexibility in their exact location; current plans would deploy marines on a rotational basis through Guam and Australia. Congressional concerns, as discussed below, have focused on cost and implementation, but have not argued that the Marine presence itself is unnecessary.

⁵ Mike Mochizuki and Michael O'Hanlon, "Rethink U.S. Military Base Plans for Japan," CNN.com Global Public Square. November 4, 2011.

Figure 2. Okinawa's Strategic Location



Source: Map created by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) using data from the U.S. State Department, 2009; and ESRI Data 10, 2009.

Notes: Distances measured using Geodesic line measurement tool in ArcGIS; rounded to tens place.

Okinawan History and Grievances

The attitudes of native Okinawans toward U.S. military bases are generally characterized as negative, reflecting a tumultuous history and complex relationships with “mainland” Japan and with the United States. Okinawans are ethnically distinct from most Japanese, which may heighten a sense of discrimination. The Ryukyu island chain, once a semi-autonomous kingdom ruled from Okinawa, was first officially incorporated into the Japanese state around the time of

the Meiji Restoration in the late 19th Century. These southern islands were largely neglected by the Japanese central government until World War II, when they became bloody battlegrounds in the final stages of the “island-hopping” campaign waged by the U.S. military. The Battle of Okinawa from early April through mid-June 1945 resulted in the deaths of up to 100,000 Japanese soldiers and 40,000-100,000 civilians, many of whom were forced by the Imperial Japanese Army to commit mass suicide.⁶ A total of 12,281 Americans were killed, the highest total of any battle in the Pacific campaign.⁷ Many Okinawans remember these few months as a dark episode in a long history of the Japanese central government sacrificing Okinawa for the good of the mainland.

The United States maintained possession of the Ryukyu islands in the peace settlement ending World War II. The U.S. military appropriated existing Japanese military installations on Okinawa and built several more large bases on the strategically located island. The United States paid locals for the acquired land, but in some cases this purchase reportedly involved deception or outright coercion, using bulldozers and bayonets to evict unwilling residents. During the period of American administration, Okinawans had no political authority or legal redress for crimes committed by service members—though the worst crimes were prosecuted through court martial. The Korean War and Vietnam War eras brought an influx of thousands of additional U.S. soldiers and added grievances to local residents, along with a major increase in revenue for businesses catering to GIs.⁸

After the reversion of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty in 1972, the pattern of crimes by American service members abated, but was nevertheless a major concern for the local population. The Japanese central government took measures to placate Okinawans, for example by increasing the rent paid to owners of land on U.S. military bases and by prosecuting eligible crimes in Japanese courts. Despite these steps and increased funds for prefectural development, many Okinawans continue to perceive themselves as the victims of policies drafted in Tokyo and Washington with little regard for their communities.

Contemporary Okinawan Views

The views of Okinawans are far from monolithic. Many residents of base-hosting communities appreciate the economic benefits, whether as employees on the bases, as local business owners who serve American customers, or as landowners of base property. Some locals resent the actions of outsiders who focus on environmental issues at the expense of economic development. Pro-relocation authorities point to the village of Henoko (in Nago City municipality) as an example of local citizens who are more in favor of additional U.S. facilities than the broader population, though this may have to do with the reported monetary compensation that Tokyo provides to specific host communities. There is also a “generation gap” between older Okinawans with personal memories of past incidents and younger residents who may not be as involved in the anti-base activist movement. There appear to be no reliable opinion polls that might illuminate the extent of the opposition to U.S. presence across demographic categories.

⁶ Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 185.

⁷ Thomas Parrish, Ed. *The Simon and Schuster Encyclopedia of World War II*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978. p. 458 and Chas S. Nichols and Henry I. Shaw. *Okinawa: Victory in the Pacific*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956. p. 260.

⁸ Steve Rabson, “Henoko and the U.S. Military: A History of Dependence and Resistance,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 10, Issue 4 No. 2, January 23, 2012.

The anti-base movement remains strong and vocal in Okinawa. Opposition to U.S. military bases derives from two main areas: (1) concerns that the American presence degrades the local quality-of-life with regard to personal safety, noise, crime, and the natural environment; and (2) pacifism and anti-militarism. These two strands are often interwoven in the rhetoric of the anti-base movement, but not all residents oppose the U.S. military presence on principle. There are those who support the U.S.-Japan security alliance while objecting to the significant and disproportionate “burden” imposed on Okinawa.

These long-held grievances burst into the forefront of Okinawan political life after a 12-year-old girl was raped by three U.S. service members in 1995, inciting a massive anti-base protest. In response, the bilateral Security Consultative Committee (composed of the U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense and their Japanese counterparts, also known as the “2+2”) established the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) to alleviate the burdens of the base-hosting communities. SACO led to concrete changes that improved conditions on Okinawa,⁹ but these propitiatory moves were offset by a number of distressing incidents; for example, a U.S. military helicopter crashed on the campus of Okinawa International University near MCAS Futenma in August 2004. Ultimately, the unwillingness of Tokyo and Washington to close Futenma without a replacement facility has fostered the perception that the two governments are discriminating against Okinawans.

Media outlets in Okinawa contribute to this narrative by viewing many developments in the base negotiations as further evidence of mainland discrimination. The two main daily newspapers, the *Ryukyu Shimpō* and the *Okinawa Times*, are generally seen as left-leaning and deeply unsympathetic to Tokyo’s security concerns. For example, the U.S. military’s humanitarian response to the devastating March 11, 2011, tsunami and earthquake in northern Japan received scant coverage in local Okinawan newspapers compared to the mainland press. In its reporting on the 2014 summit between Prime Minister Abe and President Obama, rather than applaud their intention to reduce the “burden” of U.S. bases on Okinawans, the *Ryukyu Shimpō* drew attention to the phrase “long-term sustainable presence for U.S. forces” and criticized its implication of a permanent military presence on Okinawa.¹⁰

The concerns of environmental groups stem mainly from the possible degradation of natural habitats caused by construction of the proposed FRF at Henoko. The offshore landfill design for the runways could involve the destruction of coral reefs and could have a negative impact on the health and biodiversity of Oura Bay ecosystems. Activists are particularly concerned with the plight of the dugong, a manatee-like endangered species in the Henoko Bay. The environmental impact study conducted by the Japanese government concluded that the proposed base construction would not do significant damage to the dugong’s natural environment, but academics at Okinawan universities and elsewhere have disputed the report’s findings. Another environmental concern is the impact of toxic substances stored on U.S. bases, largely a legacy of chemical storage during the Vietnam War era.¹¹

⁹ Noise reduction initiatives at Kadena Air Base reduced noise pollution for nearby residents. Six land reversion initiatives have been completed, totaling about 1,000 hectares of the approximately 6,000 hectares slated to be returned. The U.S. military relocated some live-fire exercises to mainland Japan, parachute drop training exercises from Yomitan Auxiliary Airfield to Ie Jima Auxiliary Airfield, as well as some aviation training from Okinawa to Guam.

¹⁰ Norihiro Kato, “Battle of the Okinawans,” *New York Times*, Op-Ed, May 14, 2014.

¹¹ Jon Mitchell, “Military Contamination on Okinawa: PCBs and Agent Orange at Kadena Air Base,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 12, Issue 12, No. 1, March 24, 2014.

Policy Background to Base Realignment

Attempts to make the U.S. presence in Okinawa more sustainable have been underway for years. As mentioned in the previous section, the 1996 SACO arrangement included measures “to realign, consolidate and reduce U.S. facilities and areas, and adjust operational procedures of U.S. forces in Okinawa consistent with their respective obligations under the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security and other related agreements.” The 1996 SACO Final Report mandated the release to Okinawa of thousands of acres of land that had been used by the U.S. military since World War II, including MCAS Futenma.¹² (See **Figure 1**.) Although the work was slated to be completed within a year, political gridlock and local resistance prevented significant progress on the agreement, a pattern that would repeat itself on a range of Okinawa basing issues in subsequent years.

Efforts to adjust the U.S. military presence in Japan were given new impetus in 2002 by the Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI), a bilateral initiative to enhance the U.S.-Japan security alliance. Through the DPRI talks, the United States and Japan reviewed U.S. force posture, examined opportunities for practical cooperation, and developed common strategic objectives. The 2005 Security Consultative Committee (SCC) joint statement listed 19 areas for alliance transformation, such as improving interoperability, shared use of military and civilian facilities in Japan, and cooperation on ballistic missile defense. The 2005 statement endorsed the realignment of U.S. marines from Okinawa to Guam and the relocation of Futenma Air Station operations to a new base on the shoreline of Cape Henoko.

The implementation plan for the DPRI is laid out in the May 2006 “U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation,” a document that was endorsed in three subsequent SCC joint statements. The Roadmap established the “linkages” that had been a central point of debate until 2012: (1) that the Third Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) relocation from Okinawa to Guam was dependent on “tangible progress toward completion” of the Henoko base at Camp Schwab and Japanese financial contribution to the development of facilities on Guam; and (2) that land return for areas south of Kadena Air Base was dependent upon completion of the relocation of III MEF personnel and dependents from Futenma to the FRF and Guam. In April 2012, Washington and Tokyo signed an agreement that endorsed the Henoko FRF but removed the linkage between construction of a new facility and relocation of the Marines to Guam.¹³

Overall Progress on Realignment Process

The controversy surrounding relocation of MCAS Futenma has overshadowed progress in implementing other elements of the DPRI. With the exception of the slow progress on the FRF and movement of Marines to Guam, the initiative has been largely successful. The U.S. Navy’s Carrier Air Wing Five (CVW-5) is being relocated from Naval Air Facility Atsugi to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni to reduce safety risks and noise. The Japanese government built a new offshore runway at the Iwakuni base, which began handling civilian flights in December 2012. The squadron of KC-130 cargo aircraft began to relocate to MCAS Iwakuni from Futenma in July 2014 and will complete its redeployment by the end of 2014.

¹² Various documents explaining the land reversion scheme from American and Japanese sources differ on the exact amount of land to be returned, but the figures are generally within the range of 12,500-16,000 acres of land. Futenma Air Station occupies about 1,200 acres.

¹³ For more information, reference CRS Report RS22570, *Guam: U.S. Defense Deployments*, by Shirley A. Kan.

Increased joint training activities and shared use of facilities has improved the interoperability of the U.S.-Japan alliance. The Japanese military, known as the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), conducted its first joint drill overseas in a large amphibious assault exercise with the U.S. military in California in June 2013. Japan will have access to new training facilities on Guam and the Northern Marianas Islands as a result of a 2009 bilateral agreement. The two allies continue to discuss the potential costs and benefits of increasing the number of shared-use military facilities, which some observers believe would change the image of American troops as foreign occupiers.

Impact Mitigation Measures on Okinawa

The U.S. and Japanese governments have implemented measures to mitigate some impacts of the U.S. military presence for Okinawan residents. The DPRI initiated several of these actions, whereas more recent steps were developed on an ad hoc basis. The Aviation Training Relocation program reduces noise pollution for local residents by having U.S. aircraft conduct training in Guam, away from crowded base areas. The United States has increased access for local fishermen to the ocean training area known as “Hotel/Hotel” off the eastern coast of Okinawa.

Based on the DPRI and SACO agreements, the U.S. military has turned several plots of land over to the Okinawan local authorities, including Yomitan Auxiliary Airfield, Sobe Communications Site, and Gimbaru Training Area. Several more areas of present-day U.S. military facilities are approved for expedited return in the near future. Portions of Camp Kuwae and Makiminato Service Area are scheduled to be turned over by early 2016.

A rash of off-base criminal incidents involving U.S. servicemembers in 2012 spurred U.S. military leaders in Japan to institute new conduct policies for servicemembers. These restrictive policies likely played a role in the significant drop in 2013 in reported crimes linked to U.S. military personnel (including dependents and DOD civilian employees) on Okinawa.¹⁴

The Politics of U.S. Basing in Okinawa

In the postwar period, alliance security arrangements largely have been negotiated between political-military elites in Washington and Tokyo, often ignoring local concerns.¹⁵ Even as democratic practices deepened and the anti-base movement became more empowered, many leaders in Tokyo were unable or unwilling to invest enough political capital to reduce the strains of hosting foreign troops on Okinawans.

Contemporary politics surrounding basing issues in Japan are complex and ever-shifting and involve politicians from local village wards up to the Prime Minister’s office. In 2009 and 2010, Prime Minister Hatoyama’s involvement in the Futenma controversy elevated the issue to a major U.S.-Japan point of contention and, some assert, may have irrevocably shifted the political landscape in Okinawa by raising and then dashing the hopes of the anti-base movement. However, his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) predecessors had made little progress in decades of trying to resolve the fundamental challenges of the U.S. military presence on Okinawa. The Abe government appears to have broken this stalemate by wielding unprecedented pressure and inducements in late 2013 to win over key Okinawan politicians.

¹⁴ Maan Pamintuan-Lamorena, “Okinawa saw record low number of crimes by US servicemen in 2013,” *Japan Daily Press*, March 5, 2014, <http://japandailynews.com/okinawa-saw-record-low-number-of-crimes-by-us-servicemen-in-2013-0545300/>.

¹⁵ Jennifer Lind, as quoted in “Okinawa and the Future of the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance.” The National Bureau of Asian Research, Policy Q&A, May 11, 2012.

Tokyo-Okinawa Relations

Although Washington-Tokyo relations play a role, the controversy over bases is seen by many as largely a mainland Japan versus Okinawa issue. Due to the legacy of the U.S. occupation and the islands' key strategic location, Okinawa hosts a disproportionate share of the continuing U.S. military presence. According to the Okinawan government, about 25% of all facilities used by U.S. Forces Japan are located in the prefecture, which comprises less than 1% of Japan's total land area,¹⁶ and roughly half of all U.S. military personnel are stationed in Okinawa. Many observers assert that Tokyo has failed to communicate effectively to Okinawans the necessity and benefits of the alliance. Some Okinawans see the decision to host the bulk of U.S. forces on Okinawa as a form of discrimination by mainland Japanese, who also do not want U.S. bases in their backyards.

However, Okinawa has received millions of dollars in subsidies from the central government in exchange for the burden of hosting U.S. troops. In 2012, Tokyo awarded a large amount to Okinawa for the prefecture's economic development plan: 290 billion yen (\$2.8 billion USD), with 150 billion yen (\$1.5 billion USD) designated as lump-sum grants without restrictions.¹⁷ In December 2013, immediately prior to Governor Nakaima's decision to approve the FRF landfill permit, Prime Minister Abe announced a 15% increase in the FY2014 budget for Okinawa economic development, to 346 billion yen (\$3.4 billion USD). The central government will provide at least 300 billion yen (\$2.9 billion USD) annually through 2021.¹⁸ Although the money is not explicitly linked to the basing issues, analysts assert that these generous sums influenced the governor's decision on the permit.

Role of the Prefectural Governor

The Okinawan governor's office wields significant influence over developments inside the prefecture. The governor has the authority to approve or reject off-shore landfill construction, which effectively gives him a veto over any base construction that relies on a landfill, such as the Henoko FRF plan. In the latest Futenma controversy, Governor Nakaima has played a pivotal role. First elected in 2006 with the backing of the LDP and Okinawa's business community, he has been seen as a pragmatist rather than an anti-base ideologue. In his first term, Nakaima agreed to the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko with specific conditions, including moving the base slightly more offshore. However, when Hatoyama revisited the FRF relocation plan in 2009, the political calculus changed. The Okinawan movement against the FRF proposal was rejuvenated and gained strong support on the island. Nakaima modified his position, taking a stronger anti-base stance during the 2010 gubernatorial campaign against a resolutely anti-base opponent, calling for the base to be located out of the prefecture.

Governor Nakaima Agrees to Futenma Relocation with Conditions

In late 2013, the top leadership of the ruling party, the LDP, placed heavy pressure on its Okinawa chapter to support relocation of MCAS Futenma. After the five LDP Diet Members from the prefecture changed to their stance to support the Henoko FRF plan, Governor Nakaima traveled to Tokyo to present a list of demands that appeared to be conditions for his approval of the

¹⁶ "U.S. Military Base Issues In Okinawa," on prefectural website, <http://www3.pref.okinawa.jp/site/view/contview.jsp?cateid=14&id=592&page=1>.

¹⁷ "Okinawa Governor Eager to Use Budget Boon," *Daily Yomiuri*, May 17, 2012.

¹⁸ "Okinawa to OK plan to reclaim sea area for U.S. Futenma base relocation," *Asahi Shimbun*, December 26, 2013.

landfill permit to construct the FRF. Nakaima requested that (1) the U.S. military terminate operations at MCAS Futenma within five years; (2) the U.S. military return Camp Kinser in full within seven years; (3) the U.S. military deploy at least half of its MV-22 Osprey aircraft outside of Okinawa immediately, then all Osprey after Futenma closes; and (4) the United States and Japan revise the SOFA to allow on-base investigations by prefectural officials for environmental and archaeological reasons. He also asked for supplemental funding for an Okinawan university, for a second runway at Naha airport, for a railway system, and to recover land returned by the United States. Prime Minister Abe agreed to provide the requested financial support and pledged his best efforts to fulfill the conditions regarding the U.S. military presence on Okinawa. However, it is not within the authority of the Japanese government to execute those base-related actions unilaterally, without assent from the U.S. government.

Days later, Nakaima approved the landfill permit, putting pressure on the Abe government to deliver on its promises. The U.S. government, for its part, showed a willingness to negotiate in some areas but not all. On December 25, 2013, the United States and Japan announced a framework agreement on environmental stewardship of U.S. military facilities that appears to address one of Nakaima's requests, yet without revising the SOFA. The Marine Corps has scheduled a majority of its MV-22 Osprey training outside of Okinawa. However, U.S. officials have firmly rejected any plan that would close the Futenma base before a replacement facility on Okinawa is operational. The extent to which the Japanese government can meet Nakaima's demands will likely influence how Okinawans ultimately will judge his approval of the landfill permit.

Now that Nakaima has approved the landfill permit, it is unclear what authority any future governor would have to overturn this decision. Some observers have suggested that a future governor could reject the approval on the grounds that the environmental impact assessment of the base site was incorrect. Another possibility is that the next governor could discourage the prefectural police from thwarting anti-base protestors, or employ other tactics that delay or cause inconveniences to the construction process.

The next gubernatorial election in Okinawa will be held in November 2014. The current mayor of Naha, an LDP member and former campaign manager for Nakaima, has declared his intention to run for governor as a conservative anti-base candidate. The opposition parties (generally more liberal than the LDP) are supporting the Naha mayor's candidacy on an anti-base platform. Although Nakaima's approval ratings have declined since approving the FRF construction, he has declared that he will run for re-election. (In January 2014, two weeks after the landfill permit approval, the Okinawa prefectural assembly passed a resolution urging Nakaima to quit for reneging on his election pledge to relocate the Futenma base outside the prefecture.) News reports state that a major motivation for Nakaima's re-election bid is his desire to carry out the relocation of the Futenma base without further delays¹⁹. As of August 2014, the LDP national leadership has not formally endorsed a candidate, but the Abe government appears to be working to bolster support for Nakaima on Okinawa.²⁰

¹⁹ "Okinawa conservatives split on Futenma issue in gov. race," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, July 28, 2014.

²⁰ "Govt, LDP vow to reduce burdens on Okinawa Pref.," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, July 24, 2014.

Figure 3. Location of Proposed Futenma Replacement Facility



Source: Google Maps.

Nago City Political Dynamics

Camp Schwab and the proposed new aviation facility are located in Henoko, a ward of the larger Nago City. The politics of Nago City mirror that of Okinawa in their complexity and tangle of interests. A 1997 city referendum revealed that a majority of voters opposed the new base construction, but despite this result successive mayors declared their conditional approval.²¹ In January 2014, the city re-elected mayor Susumu Inamine, who strongly opposes any increased military presence. Inamine has vowed that he will obstruct any cooperation with the central government on construction of the FRF.²² A slim majority of current city council members are also against the Henoko relocation plan.

On the other hand, the residents who would be most directly affected have mixed, and even positive, feelings about the proposed base, possibly due to the economic benefits for the hosting community. A small mountain range about seven miles wide separates the designated base site in Henoko village from the densely populated area of Nago City (see **Figure 3**). It is unlikely that

²¹ Mayor Tateo Kishimoto announced his conditional approval of a reef-based land reclamation plan with a short runway on September 20, 2005, and Mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro gave his approval for the land reclamation plan with a V-shaped runway on April 7, 2006. Source: Brooks, William, *The Politics of the Futenma Base Issue in Okinawa: Relocation Negotiations in 1995-1997, 2005-2006*. Asia-Pacific Policy Papers Series, No. 9, Edwin O. Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies, 2010.

²² Erik Slavin, "Okinawa mayor plans to block Marine base, says re-election gives him mandate," *Stars and Stripes*, February 13, 2014.

most people living in Nago City would experience the noise of overflights near the base. In May 2010 the administrative council of Henoko village, where the base would be built, passed a resolution accepting the relocation of Futenma on the conditions that the runway site be moved further into the sea and that the government provide additional compensation.²³ Henoko village residents are reportedly more focused on the economic benefits of the new base and irked by the intrusion of environmentalists.²⁴

Congressional Involvement

In the past few years, Congress has exercised its oversight function on the military realignment initiatives in Japan and related movement to Guam. Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee in particular have voiced doubts about the viability of the Marine Corps realignment, questioned witnesses closely about the Defense Department's plans in the Asia-Pacific in a series of hearings, sent letters to the Secretary of Defense outlining their reservations, and inserted specific provisions into legislation to ensure that the executive branch heeds their concerns. In general, Members of the House Armed Services Committee have been more supportive of the Marine Corps realignment and more willing to fund initial components without a complete Master Plan.

Concerns Raised in 2011

In May 2011, three Senators (Carl Levin, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee; John McCain, then-ranking minority Member of that committee; and James H. (Jim) Webb, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs) released a joint statement that called the U.S. military realignment plans in East Asia, and particularly those on Okinawa, "unworkable and unaffordable." They recommended alternatives, including transferring Marine Corps assets to the Kadena Air Base on Okinawa and moving some Air Force assets to Andersen Air Force Base on Guam. Senator Webb further proposed in subsequent letters to the Secretary of Defense that co-basing arrangements with the Japanese military be explored, as well as the use of aviation facilities on Okinawa during military contingencies.

Soon afterward, in June 2011, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report commissioned by the Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies, Senate Appropriations Committee. The report concluded that the Department of Defense had neither adequately estimated the costs involved in transforming its military posture in Japan and Guam nor analyzed the alternatives to existing initiatives.²⁵ The initial estimate was for an expense of \$10.3 billion to move 8,000 Marines and their dependents to Guam, but the GAO reported that the actual costs would be more than double the Department of Defense (DOD) estimate at \$23.9 billion.²⁶ The cost to DOD for the latest plan, to move roughly 5,000 Marines and their dependents to Guam, has been estimated at \$8.6 billion.

²³ William Brooks, *The Politics of the Futenma Base Issue in Okinawa: Relocation Negotiations in 1995-1997, 2005-2006*. Asia-Pacific Policy Papers Series, No. 9, Edwin O. Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies, 2010.

²⁴ Rabson from Inoue (2007) and <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20100609a5.html>.

²⁵ Full report can be found at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d11316.pdf>.

²⁶ Travis J. Tritten, "Cost to Relocate Marines off Okinawa a Moving Target," *Stars and Stripes*, May 15, 2012.

Funding Cuts and New Requirements in FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act

Increasing alarm about the overall U.S. fiscal situation drove further scrutiny of existing plans. Concern about the ballooning costs of the Guam construction and the uncertainty surrounding the realignment led Congress to reject the Administration's request for related military construction funding in the FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), P.L. 112-81. Section 2207 of the act prohibited funds authorized for appropriation, as well as amounts provided by the Japanese government, from being obligated to implement the planned realignment of Marine Corps forces from Okinawa to Guam until certain justifications and assessments were provided. These included an explanation of the Marine Corps' preferred force lay-down in the region; a Master Plan for the construction involved in the plan; a certification by the Secretary of Defense that "tangible progress" had been made on the Futenma base relocation; the submission of the independent assessment required by Section 346 (see the section of this report immediately following); and a series of plans involving infrastructure and construction costs on Guam.

The April 2012 "de-linking" agreement did not appear to assuage congressional concerns. After the announcement that the original policy would be adjusted and the base relocation and Marine redeployment de-linked, Senators Levin, McCain, and Webb wrote in a letter to Defense Secretary Panetta that

... we have serious questions that have not been fully addressed regarding the emerging agreement between the administration and the Government of Japan. These questions pertain to the core details of this or any basing arrangement, including cost estimates, military sustainment and force management, and how it would support a broader strategic concept of operations in this increasingly vital region. Congress has important oversight and funding responsibilities beyond its traditional consultative role for this basing agreement, and any new proposal should not be considered final until it has the support of the Congress.²⁷

CSIS Assessment

Section 346 of the FY2012 NDAA required an independent assessment of the U.S. strategic posture in the Asia-Pacific. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) was commissioned by the Secretary of Defense to provide the report. CSIS delivered it in mid-July 2012 to the Secretary, who then forwarded the report with his comments to the Senate and House Armed Services Committees. In its unclassified version, the report broadly supports DOD's strategy to enhance U.S. defense posture in East Asia and recommends, with caveats, the implementation of the April 2012 agreement, including the construction of the FRF.²⁸ While asserting that the Henoko plan is the best way forward geostrategically and operationally, it also acknowledges the budgeting and political obstacles that confront the FRF, concluding that other alternatives should still be explored. Among those other alternatives are Kadena Integration, the stationing of Marine air operations on an off-shore island, construction of a second runway at Naha Airport, and remaining at the current Futenma base. The report also recommends

²⁷ "Senators Levin, McCain and Webb Express Concern to Secretary Panetta Regarding Asia-Pacific Basing," April 24, 2012. Accessed at <http://www.levin.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/senators-levin-mccain-and-webb-express-concern-to-secretary-panetta-regarding-asia-pacific-basing/?section=alltypes>.

²⁸ "U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 27, 2012. Accessed at <http://www.levin.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/-statement-of-senators-levin-mccain-and-webb-on-csis-report>.

prioritizing infrastructure improvements on Guam that would facilitate the transfer of Marines. In a statement, Senators Webb, Levin, and McCain said that, “We agree with CSIS’s emphasis on the need for DOD to articulate the strategy behind its force-posture planning more clearly. Congress must also be confident that the DOD force planning and realignment proposals are realistic, workable, and affordable.”²⁹

Incremental Progress on Realignment since 2013

The realignment of the Marine Corps in the Asia-Pacific region has proceeded incrementally since 2013, even as Congress has restricted some spending for the realignment on Guam. The FY2013 NDAA (P.L. 112-239) incorporated the Senate’s language prohibiting DOD spending (including expenditure of funds provided by the Japanese government) to implement the realignment on Guam, with certain exceptions. The bill authorized DOD to do design work for future construction, conduct environmental assessments, and start construction of a project that would support the Marine Corps presence on Guam but has a justification independent from the realignment. The FY2013 NDAA also included requests for DOD to provide documents to help Congress understand the military’s plans for the region and projected infrastructure needs on Guam. According to the conference report accompanying the NDAA, the conferees raised concerns that moving forward with the realignment prematurely could create operational risks for the military and the risk of wasteful spending.

The FY2014 NDAA (P.L. 113-66) took the same approach to the Marine Corps realignment: an overall freeze on DOD spending on Guam, but with exceptions that allowed some related construction to go forward. The GAO released another report in June 2013 that criticized DOD for unreliable cost estimates and the lack of an integrated plan for the realignment.³⁰ Visiting Japan in August 2013, Senator McCain repeated his concerns that DOD did not have adequate plans for the Marine Corps realignment.³¹ In August 2014, DOD submitted to Congress a Master Plan describing the future disposition of the Marine Corps on Guam and the cost and schedule of necessary construction. The Guam Master Plan does not include information about the anticipated Marine Corps relocation from Okinawa to Hawaii.

The beginning of construction on the Henoko FRF may provide some momentum to the supporters of the Marine Corps realignment, but developments on Okinawa are no longer the crux of the current debate. Senator McCain released a statement on December 27, 2013, stating, “After 17 years of hard work and setbacks, today’s action paves the way for the construction of the [FRF], the redeployment of U.S. Marines from [MCAS] Futenma, and the broader realignment of U.S. forces on Okinawa and in the Asia-Pacific region.”³² Despite this tangible progress, the Senate Armed Services Committee has retained in its FY2015 NDAA the overall freeze on DOD spending for the realignment on Guam, a possible indicator that developments on Okinawa have become delinked from concerns about the military build-up on Guam.

²⁹ “Statement of Senators Levin, McCain and Webb on CSIS Report,” July 27, 2012. Accessed at <http://www.levin.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/-statement-of-senators-levin-mccain-and-webb-on-csis-report>.

³⁰ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *More Reliable Cost Estimates and Further Planning Needed to Inform the Marine Corps Realignment Initiatives in the Pacific*, GAO-13-360, June 2013.

³¹ Travis Tritten, “Lack of solid plan holds up Marines’ move from Okinawa, McCain says,” *Stars and Stripes*, August 22, 2013.

³² “Statement by Senator McCain on the Governor of Okinawa’s Decision to Sign Landfill Permit for Futenma Replacement Facility,” Washington, DC, December 27, 2013, <http://www.mccain.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=ccd5642e-829f-4b91-81ef-ff69a81ca47c>.

Ongoing Risks of Futenma Operations

As Tokyo and Washington have struggled to overcome paralysis on the agreement, the problematic base at the center of the controversy has remained operational but in need of serious repair and maintenance. In recognition of the pressing repair needs, U.S. and Japanese government officials committed to “contribute mutually to necessary refurbishment projects” at MCAS Futenma in the joint statement issued by the Security Consultative Committee in April 2012. Although these projects are vital to continued operations at Futenma, Okinawans may interpret the repairs as a sign that the United States and Japan do not intend to fulfill their goal of closing the base. The joint consolidation plan for Okinawa released by the U.S. and Japanese governments in April 2013 states that Futenma will be turned over to local authorities no earlier than 2022.

The base is located within a dense urban area, surrounded by schools and other facilities that are subjected to the high noise levels that accompany an active military training site. (See **Figure 4**.) A new equipment accident or serious crime committed by a U.S. servicemember could galvanize further Okinawan opposition to the U.S. military presence on the island. The risks are heightened by the anticipated increase in activity as units that have been deployed to conflicts in the Middle East return to Okinawa. Despite the April 2012 agreement to move about 9,000 Marines off Okinawa, the absolute number of personnel and aircraft is expected to rise at Futenma and other facilities in the near term.

Figure 4. MCAS Futenma



Source: Google Maps.

Deployment of MV-22 “Osprey” Aircraft to Futenma³³

The U.S. Marine Corps replaced the 24 CH-46E “Sea Knight” helicopters stationed at the Futenma base with 24 MV-22 “Osprey” tilt-rotor aircraft in 2012 and 2013. The deployment of the first 12 Osprey aircraft to Japan in mid-2012 caused a public outcry in Okinawa and mainland base-hosting communities. Japanese politicians and civil society groups opposed introduction of the MV-22 to Japan due to the aircraft’s safety record.³⁴ However, the arrival of the second batch of 12 Ospreys in 2013 was greeted by substantially smaller protests in Okinawa.

The crashes of V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft in training exercises in Morocco and Florida in early 2012 reminded Okinawans of the U.S. military helicopter crash on the grounds of a school near Futenma Air Station in August 2004. In response to citizens’ concerns, the Japanese government conducted its own investigation of the aircraft’s safety in 2012. The investigation cleared the MV-22 for deployment, but concerns linger, especially in Okinawa. Intense public scrutiny of the aircraft’s safety record may be connected to widespread distrust of the government stemming from the March 2011 nuclear crisis. Observers warn that a crash involving an MV-22 Osprey on Okinawa could galvanize the anti-base movement and create serious problems for the alliance. The crash of another model of helicopter, an HH-60G Pave Hawk, on a U.S. training area in Okinawa in August 2013 renewed the sense of danger among Okinawans, but it did not spark widespread demonstrations.

The introduction of the advanced tilt-rotor aircraft to Okinawa reportedly will enhance the operational capability of the Marines based there, particularly in a rapid response scenario. The SDF has expressed interest in acquiring its own fleet of V-22s, which could be assigned to remote island defense and amphibious operations. Seeking to highlight the aircraft’s utility for operations other than war, the United States and Japan featured the MV-22 Osprey in a joint disaster relief drill on mainland Japan in October 2013. Okinawa-based MV-22s conducted disaster relief operations in the Philippines following the devastation of Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in November 2013.

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³³ For more, see CRS Report RL31384, *V-22 Osprey Tilt-Rotor Aircraft Program*, by Jeremiah Gertler.

³⁴ During its development phase, the Osprey suffered several highly publicized crashes. Since the aircraft achieved initial operational capability in 2007, the Class-A mishap rate has been slightly better than the Marine Corps average. See the CRS Report RL31384, *V-22 Osprey Tilt-Rotor Aircraft Program*, by Jeremiah Gertler, for more information.